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ABSTRACT

Beginning with an analogy of today's schools as factories, this paper describes the conditions which make it both possible and imperative to transform schools. Examples are given of resources that may be used to support school-based changes, such as foundations, regional laboratories, professional associations, and universities. A model is offered for school-based change that is a formal approach to school improvement, focused at the school level, and designed to develop collaborative efforts in support of learning. It is pointed out that staff development will be centrally and critically important in creating the schools of the future. (JD)

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# GROWING INTO SCHOOLS OF THE FUTURE

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and
Nancy Lee

Presented to the National Council of States on Inservice Education, Denver, CO November 22, 1985

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOL CHANGE:

# GROWING INTO SCHOOLS OF THE FUTURE

Gary Obermeyer
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## INTRODUCTION

Beginning with an analogy of today's schools as factories, this paper describes the conditions which make it both possible and imperative to transform schools.

School-based change models are analyzed to present a view of the skills which will be required of school staff. The conclusion is that staff development will be centrally and critically important in creating the schools of the future.

ASSUMPTIONS:

* There is general agreement that the mission of schools is to develop individual potential and to prepare students to be productive members of society. Most importantly, there is a need to develop, within students, the skills of self-directedness, problem solving, and critical thinking.

* The conditions of learning are changing. An explosion of information is changing the definition of intelligence and the role of teacher. Information technology is giving more choices to the individual learner. Schools need to adapt to these new conditions.

* The creative energy needed to transform schools can be found in the current school staff. Further, this transformation can be facilitated by conceptualizing school as an organization of people, and a process to support human growth and development; rather than a place or a building.

## THE FACTORY IS AN OBSOLETE PARADIGM FOR LEARNING

In the factory-style school, students are assigned in groups of 20-30-40, possibly more. The first and most important thing they learn is that they all get treated the same--they will all be exposed to the same facts at the same time. Since learning has to fit predetermined time blocks, interests have to fit arbitrary boundaries. All too often, students are passive recipients of learning. Self-directed learning is the exception in a system which makes most of the decisions for them.

These factories employ and perpetuate a very narrow definition of intelligence; partly as a matter of habit, and partly because of the measurement system. Students are measured in ways that can be reduced to numbers. The numbers are used to make comparisons and sort "smart" ones from "not-so-smart" ones.

Teachers are the factory workers, assigned to separate spaces along an assembly-line. Job descriptions are based on subject matter, minutes, and head-count. The workplace is designed for efficient distribution of "knowledge" and the workers have the responsibility to "motivate" the students to fit the distribution schedule. Students and teachers have very little authority to influence the design of the system.

The following points are provided as background to a later discussion of the potential to be realized through school-based change:

1) The people who work in the factory-style school work in isolation from each other.(31) Teachers feel that they have a limited amount of influence on the total system, but at least, have autonomy within their own classrooms. It is as if there is an unvritten agreement which says:

> "This is your space. You have complete discretion as long as what you do fits 47 minute time periods, it doesn't cost any more money, and it doesn't require anybody else to change. By all means keep it under control!"

2) It is difficult to make changes, because growth or emphasis in one space may have negative implications for the others. For instance, a field trip requires that others give up time with "their" students. Increased enrollment in one class, program, etc., may take from others. Even something as simple as laughter in one classroom can create jealousy and suspicion. One way of managing the system, while minimizing the fear, is to agree that nothing will change. Kanter's description of segmentalist organizations describes such conditions.(27)

3) There is a built-in talent drain because prestige is measured in distance from the assembly-line.(14) Teachers are promoted away from teaching, and the further they get from classrooms, the more they "earn" to make decisions for those who are left behind. Classroom escapees can go into administration, consulting, research, association work, etc.

4) There is a tendency to blame others for the lack of control over little spaces.(27) The script may go something like this,

"I could do a better job if...

...I had never books."

...the kids vanted to learn."

...the parents vere interested."

...the teachers before me had done their job."

...the administrators got rid of the ones who didn't."

5) School people themselves help inform the public that schools need to change. Whether individuals are complaining to friends or organized groups are arguing policy, the effect is that the blaming reaches the public and contributes to the political energy which is imposing itself on schools.(24)

6) A public which has less direct contact vith schools is increasingly supportive of policies which vill subject schools, students, and teachers to more standardized assessment. The result is that there is more standardized instruction and there is less room for professional judgment.(49) The spaces keep getting smaller.

7) Most of the "reforms" generated by the Excellence Movement are little more than adjustments in the current system.(4,51) Separate interest groups are engaged in a policy arms race, escalating the battles over who will control the little spaces; each contributing to the politicizing and centralizing of educational decisions.(56)

8) Research shows that the bureaucratization of classrooms affects how teachers feel about teaching.(12,18,32) Sizer provides a sobering analysis of the situation.(51)

> "Behind top-down regulation lies a distrust of American teachers....proud people rarely join professions that heavily monitor them. Being trusted is the elixir of commitment."

He concludes,

> "Eventually, hierarchical bureaucracy will be totally self-validating: virtually all teachers will be semicompetent, and thus nothing but top-down control will be tolerable. America is now well on the way to this state of affairs."

9) Parents who loose confidence in schools or feel that schools do not give them enough voice in matters affecting the learning of their children, will find increasing alternatives available to them.(34)

## THE SCHOOL AS A FOCAL POINT FOR CHANGE

The conditions which have been previously described may well be contributing to a rethinking of the approaches to reform. In the midst of all the "reform" activity, there is an emerging consensus that true and lasting change will have to occur in each school.

* Reaction to the centralizing trend is influencing the debate about schools. The February 6, 1985, edition of Education Week described a "Barrage of Initiatives," and the May 8, 1985, edition reported that "Top-Down Reforms Rekindle Old Debate for Local Boards." The November, 1985, Kappan devoted a special section to

1984, Educational Leadership featured articles arguing for policies to promote local autonomy.

• Effective schools research has provided a rallying point for those who believe that schools make a difference. This research describes characteristics of schools which have demonstrated success in certain student performances. Policy-makers are converting these findings into school programs which will place additional expectations on schools.(11)

Among recently published reports and articles, the focus on the school is clear:

• The National Education Association in An Open Letter to America: On Schools, Students, and Tomorrow, asserts "It is time to return authority to school building staff, to strengthen the ability of the school staff to manage schools."(40)

• One of Sizer's imperatives for better schools is to "Give room to students and teachers to work in their own, appropriate ways."(52)

• The theme of decentralizing runs throughout Finn's "Nine Commandments for Enhancing School Effectiveness." He advocates that "State and federal policy makers should generally avoid inhibiting school-level governance in the fundamental realms of teaching, learning, and internal organization."(17)

• The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools is piloting an Outcomes Accreditation model which allows schools discretion in selecting and defining standards of quality and equity.(42)

• Support for autonomy at the school level can also be found in the corporate sector. The Committee for Economic Development lists in its 'Ten Imperatives':(10)

> "Greater trust should be placed in the initiative of individual schools."
>
> "Teachers and administrators should have increased decision making power."

WORDS INTO ACTION

Resources to support school-based change can be found in different types of institutions. Examples are:

• Foundations are a potential source of financial support for school change work. In 1965, the Kettering Foundation established the Institute for Development of Educational Activities. which conducted an extensive study of school-based change.(58) More recently, the Carnegie Foundation funded nineteen grants as a follow-up to the recommendations in High School. Another example is the Northwest Area Foundation which funded eight projects in school-based management for the 1985-86 school year. The criteria specified that "projects must demonstrate decision-making that is shared by teachers, administrators, parents, and other community members and is independent of district management--especially in the areas of budgeting, staffing, and

• The regional laboratories have been active in school-based change. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory has developed a model of goal-based instructional management called "Onward to Excellence." NWREL employs an Effective Schools Research base in providing technical assistance to the more than one hundred school sites currently being served.(44)

• Professional associations have interests to be served in advocating and experimenting in school-based change. The NEA Mastery in Learning Project is designed to help faculty "...become more influential in shaping decisions about teaching, learning and the curriculum." and to document "...the efficacy of a school-based, faculty-led approach to school improvement."(40)

• Universities develop relationships with schools for the interest they have in staff development. Wayne State University, for instance, has created a six-step model for school improvement and has experience facilitating the process.(54)

## A MODEL FOR SCHOOL-BASED CHANGE

There is interest in improving schools, and there are resources available to bring about change. However, change is not necessarily improvement. Over-zealous application of effective schools findings could have the effect of further narrowing and standardizing what happens in schools.(11)

In the introduction to Changing Schools: the Magic Feather Principle, (5) John Goodlad writes,

> "...adults in schools ultimately must learn to help themselves. Nobody can or should do the job for them. This means that they must strive together, preferably with students and parents, to make their settings for daily work better places for human beings to spend a large portion of each day. This means they must think together, plan together, decide together, and act together in dealing with the problems inevitably inherent in schools. This is not easy; in fact, it is extraordinarily difficult. Consequently, those seeking to so engage themselves need all the help they can get, and those who have not yet begun require encouragement. For schools to change, there must be an internal process and a structure to support and sustain it."

If certain conditions are met, school staff can fashion a support system around the learning process. The authors identify these conditions for school-based change:

(a) FORMAL APPROACHES TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

(b) WHICH ARE FOCUSED AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL AND

(c) ARE DESIGNED TO DEVELOP COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

(d) IN SUPPORT OF LEARNING.

(a) In the best of situations, the formal decision is a ratification and endorsement of a commitment which has already been made by the staff. The experience of quality circles demonstrates the importance of organizational support. (28)

The organization provides legitimacy and support through a clear statement of mission. This is the tight half of the loose-tight characteristic described by Peters and Waterman. (45) Clarity of mission (or shared values) allows the organization to give more autonomy (or looseness) in accomplishing the work. School-based

district defines clearly what is to happen and the staff determines how to get there. The experience of alternative schools demonstrates that such a contract can work.(47)

(b) The focus at the building level is in alignment with the best of what is known about school organizations and about organizational change. Research has shown that individual schools interpret district-wide policies differently.(34) Trust in bottom-up reform and the decentralizing of resources are essential ingredients to school improvement.(21)

(c) Collaboration will benefit the schools. Things begin to happen when groups of people are empowered to solve problems. There is growing body of knowledge in both the public and private sectors to demonstrate the benefits of direct and meaningful participation by workers in the improvement of organizations.(46) Kanter provides a detailed description of teams as a source of innovation.(27)

Collaboration will also produce benefits for the school staff. Surveys have repeatedly shown that teachers want opportunities to work with other teachers.(33) Countless studies have demonstrated that participants value the peer support, sharing of ideas, experience of collegiality and inquiry, and group decision-making.

(d) Support for learning is the bottom line. The aim of school-based change should be to have instructional needs drive the system.

## THE CHANGE PROCESS

An analysis of current school-based change models shows that they vary in specifics but look generally similar. The authors offer the following as a generic process for school-based change which, if the previously described conditions are met, is a means to transform schools. The four major components are:

1) ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS
2) PROBLEM-FINDING AND GOAL-SETTING
3) PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION
4) EVALUATION AND REPORTING

### 1) ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS

Purpose: To provide an inventory and reference point for school improvement work.

Method: The site administrator(s) works with staff to develop awareness and understanding of community expectations and resources. Individual staff members and staff groups generate multiple assessments, both quantitative and qualitative, of student attitudes and performance. The entire staff develops a composite analysis of the data to produce a profile of community and students.

Outcomes: The change process begins with a "close to the customer"(45) orientation and begins to break down the separate spaces.

2) PROBLEM-FINDING AND GOAL-SETTING

Purpose: To identify impediments to effectiveness and to set priorities for improvement.

Method: Individual staff members and staff groups identify areas of need. The entire staff works through a process to understand the various needs and set priorities for improvement. The site administrator(s) supports and facilitates the process.

Outcomes: Discussion of common problems builds commitment to common goals and further reduces the isolation. The problem-finding activities provide a constructive outlet for the frustrations that might ordinarily manifest themselves in blaming behavior. By its very nature, this is a concerns-based approach to school improvement.(31)

3) PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Purpose: To develop, test, and implement alternative designs and approaches to instruction.

Method: Individual staff members and staff groups will develop and/or select solutions to address the priorities set by the total staff. Changes which require support and/or change from others will be judged by measures related to the shared goals.

Outcomes: The traditional role of staff changes, from consumers, to initiators of innovation. The role of the administrator becomes one of developing and supporting the creativity of the staff. If there are shared goals, then numerous approaches can be applied and experimentation can flourish. Room to make professional judgments will increase. Staff members will find many of the resources they need in the knowledge and experience of their colleagues. Over time, the separate spaces will all but disappear. School staff will have an opportunity to transform the workplace through the school improvement process. Through the experiences of alternative schools and quality circles we know a great deal about the growth that will occur. (29, 47)

4) EVALUATION AND REPORTING

Purpose: To judge the degree of success, to provide a basis for further change, and to gain support for change.

Method: Staff will measure the results against the goals and objectives of the original design, and use the results to learn what worked and what did not work. The site administrator(s) will be in a position to evaluate the evaluation processes.

Outcomes: Reporting of the results of improvement efforts provides the basis for enlisting further support, from the school district and from the community, for further change efforts. This is the means by which schools will be allowed to be different from one another and to withstand the political reaction to change.

As improvement planning systems become more sophisticated and credible, we can expect that greater autonomy will be granted to school staff. This, in turn, will provide more growing room for individual staff members.

CONCLUSION

The factories will not be replaced with ready-made, prefabricated structures. Schools of the future will be created by the staff in response to student needs and in the context of the community.

Everybody wins! The public gets better schools and school people get more growing room.

We can expect that significant resources will be dedicated to school improvement over the next few years. However, none of it will work without first making an investment in the staff. The means to transform schools is within the staff itself. The skills to transform schools will need to be learned. In the schools of the future, staff development and school improvement will be synonymous.

Finally, the better the staff is equipped to manage the resources to support learning, the more there is to be gained from this period of public attention. This may be the best (and last) opportunity to assure the viability of public schools in the Information Age.

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